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Being Chinese Again

Learning Mandarin in Post-Suharto Indonesia

Charlotte Setijadi

INTRODUCTION

For thirty-two years under former President Suharto's New Order regime (from 1966–1998), the teaching of Chinese languages in schools was banned in Indonesia. During this period of total assimilation, public displays of Chinese characters, along with other forms of Chinese cultural expressions, were prohibited, allegedly for the sake of national unity. From 1966–69, hundreds of Chinese medium schools and Chinese language press were closed in Chinese settlements throughout the archipelago, and the formal teaching of Chinese languages in Indonesia effectively ceased. As a result, the majority of contemporary Chinese Indonesians no longer have the ability to speak, let alone write in, Chinese.

As has been extensively documented, the situation only changed when, after months of economic crisis, political instability and student protests demanding the resignation of President Suharto, the chaos culminated in large-scale lootings, destruction of properties and rape of ethnic Chinese women between 12 and 14 May 1998 in Jakarta, Solo and other major cities (see Hoon, 2007; Purdey, 2006). Soon after, the New Order regime collapsed and a new era of reform (*reformasi*) began, with promises of civil society, democracy, civil liberties and justice. The post-Suharto sociopolitical atmosphere could not be more different for the ethnic Chinese, whereby almost immediately, subsequent *reformasi* governments abolished almost all assimilationist policies, ushering in a 'revival' of Chinese identity (see Hoon, 2007; Setijadi, 2010). Since 1998, there has been a steady increase in the number of Chinese language courses and programs at Indonesian schools and universities, particularly in areas with large ethnic Chinese populations.

Indeed, after three decades of assimilation, many Chinese parents—the majority of whom do not speak Chinese themselves—want their children to learn Chinese in order to 'reconnect' to a 'lost' Chinese identity. At a more pragmatic level, they are also deeply aware of the potential economic advantages of knowing Mandarin for the purposes of their children's future career advancement, trade and *guanxi* with rapidly rising China. This pragmatism is reflected in the overwhelming popularity of Mandarin (particularly the

standardised *Putonghua* variety used as the national language in China) as *the* language to learn, and not regional dialects such as Teochew, Hakka or Hokkien, originally spoken by the majority of Chinese migrants in the Indonesian archipelago. The youth themselves seem to embrace learning Mandarin with many increasingly engaging in code switching between English, Mandarin and Indonesian in social interactions. In addition, the ability to speak or at least understand Mandarin also enables young Chinese Indonesians to further imagine themselves as part of a modern pan-Chinese youth identity they see in transnational Mandarin and Cantonese films, TV series and pop culture.

Looking at all these trends, the ability to speak Chinese (particularly Mandarin) appears to play an important part in the construction of Chinese identities in the post-Suharto era. Thus far, however, little is known about the linguistic practices and beliefs of contemporary Chinese Indonesians. Furthermore, considering that only fifteen years ago, Chinese languages and culture were banned, questions also need to be asked regarding how the 'return' of Chinese languages in public are perceived by Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians. Using ethnographic interviews with twenty-five young Chinese Indonesians¹ ages 18 to 35 from both genders conducted in Jakarta from 2008–2012, this chapter examines how young post-Suharto Chinese view their ethnic identity and belonging in relation to their ability (or inability) to speak Chinese. This chapter also discusses the tensions between competing ideologies on ethnicity, nationalism and culture as embodied in the daily negotiations of which language(s) to speak and when.

CHINESE INDONESIANS, CHINESENESS AND CHINESE LANGUAGES IN INDONESIA

The prohibition of Chinese languages during the New Order period was only one example of the many instances of anti-Chinese discrimination that had occurred almost consistently throughout the history of Chinese settlement in the Indonesian archipelago. Whereas the Chinese had had a long history of migration to Indonesia that began in pre-colonial times, the Dutch colonial policy of racial segregation successfully perpetuated a negative image of the Chinese as economically dominant 'essential outsiders' who did not sympathise with the plight of the native ('*pribumi*' in Indonesian) population (Chiro and Reid, 1997). Throughout the periods of Dutch colonialism, independence struggle and the early days of the Indonesian Republic, the Chinese's belonging and national identity in Indonesia remained ambiguous at best, regardless of the fact that many ethnic Chinese were nationalists who supported the independence cause. As Filomeno Aguilar, Jr. suggests, in the course of Indonesian nationalist awakening, the Chinese were attributed a definite, distant place of origin—China—and thus the descendants of Chinese migrants became 'indelibly linked to the

first-generation immigrants and, in an unbroken chain, remained forever aliens' (2001: 517).

Chinese Indonesians themselves were, and always had been, a heterogeneous group consisting of people that came from various regions in China, spoke different languages (Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese and Teochew being the four major spoken languages), held different political views and felt varying degrees of belonging towards the Indonesian nation. The traditional groupings of Chinese Indonesians as either '*totok*' ('pure' Chinese with no mixed ancestry) or '*peranakan*' (acculturated Chinese, usually with mixed Chinese-native Indonesian ancestry) illustrate the different 'types' of Chinese in Indonesia with different connections to the Chinese homeland, language and culture² (see Coppel, 1983). Unlike the *totok* Chinese who maintained Chinese traditions, culture and language in Indonesia, the *peranakan* Chinese mostly identified with the cultures of their local regions, spoke local languages instead of Chinese and developed their own unique hybrid culture from a mixture of Chinese and local cultural influences. Nevertheless, the discourse of '*Masalah Cina*' (the 'Chinese Problem') in Indonesia collapsed the diversity of ethnic Chinese lives into one alleged problem that needed to be 'fixed' with a convenient phraseology.

Following the alleged failed communist coup of 30 September 1965 (G-30S/PKI in the national terminology), in which many ethnic Chinese individuals and organisations were implicated, President Suharto's New Order regime 'took control' of rising anti-Chinese sentiment with a series of assimilationist legislations (see Cribb & Coppel, 2009). In 1966, Cabinet Presidium Decision 127 required all ethnic Chinese to discard their Chinese names and adopt 'Indonesian-sounding' ones. In 1967, Presidential Instruction Number 14 on Chinese Religion, Beliefs, and Traditions effectively banned any Chinese literature and public displays of cultural expression in Indonesia, including the prohibition of Chinese characters. Furthermore, as part of the 'Basic Policy for the Solution of the Chinese Problem' (Presidential Decision No. 240 of 1967) and other measures, only one heavily monitored Chinese-language newspaper was allowed to continue and all Chinese language schools were eventually phased out. Buildings and properties owned by Chinese educational organisations were seized and 'nationalised' for use by state-run schools. Sai Siew-Min (2010) estimates that, in the late 1960s, the ban on Chinese language education affected 629 schools, 6,478 teachers and 272,782 students in eleven cities across Indonesia.³

The prohibition of Chinese languages throughout the New Order was consistent with the prevalent national language ideology at the time that viewed the elimination of 'non-native' languages such as Chinese as necessary for national unity. Since the beginning of the Indonesian nationalist movement in the early twentieth century, the Malay language came to be seen as a strong contender as the emerging nation's *lingua franca* because it was perceived as a common language of the natives (Kahin, 1963). At the historic Second Youth Congress on 28 October 1928 when youth

delegations from native ethnic groups across the archipelago pledged their oath (known from then on as the 'Youth Oath') towards a unified Indonesian nation, modernised Malay (renamed 'Indonesian') was adopted as the language of the new nation, privileged above all other native and non-native languages. The centrality of Indonesian as the language of national unity was evident in its teaching as a compulsory language in schools and as the only language of politics, trade and national culture, although the government was committed in principle to protecting local languages. As non-native languages spoken by a sociopolitically 'problematic' ethnic minority, the prohibition of Chinese languages was easily justified. In this regard, the banning of Chinese reflected the popular view of Chinese Indonesians as essentially foreigners within the framework of Indonesia's ethno-nationalist ideology.

Ariel Heryanto (2006) argues that the effect of the assimilation policies was the lasting image of Chineseness as ideologically unclean, dangerous, shameful and therefore in need of erasure. Connections with China in the late 1960s had strong communist connotations, and anyone caught speaking in Chinese was viewed with strong suspicion and anger. Chinese languages became confined to the private domains, and many parents stopped teaching their children Chinese altogether. Over the three decades of assimilation from 1966 to 1998, Chinese Indonesian language, culture and identity were in many ways 'erased' or at least hidden from public view, although their forced assimilation also had the paradoxical effect of accentuating the group's essential foreignness in the national imagination.

As mentioned before, the end of the New Order marked the beginning of a new Chinese identity politics that started with demands for the abolition of assimilationist laws and justice for the victims of the May '98 rapes and riots (see Budiman, 2005; Purdey, 2006; Turner, 2003). Indeed, post-Suharto governments were only too eager to prove their commitment to human rights issues and move away from the harmful legacies of the New Order and May 1998 by implementing new laws that recognised the rights of Chinese Indonesians. The Habibie government (1998–1999) started off these reforms through a Presidential Instruction that abolished the use of the terms '*pribumi*' and 'non-*pribumi*' in official government documents. In the year 2000, the newly elected President Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001) revoked bans against Chinese languages, religion and cultural expressions, allowing Chinese culture to be practiced in public once more. President Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001–2004) made *Imlek* (Chinese New Year) a national holiday in 2002 as an official gesture of recognition for both Chinese Indonesians and the Confucian (*Konghucu*) religion that was added as one of the state's six official religions. The stark contrast between the New Order and the post-Suharto era led many ethnic Chinese to view the *reformasi* era as a time for the revival of Chinese culture in Indonesia.

One of the most noticeable changes that occurred in the post-Suharto era is the return of Chinese languages and script in the public domain.

Previously banned, Chinese characters could be seen on posters, banners and store decorations, particularly during annual *Imlek* celebrations. More and more, Mandarin and other Chinese languages are being spoken in public by Chinese Indonesians who feel that it is now 'safe' to speak Chinese in front of *pribumi* Indonesians. Perhaps more significantly, the fall of the New Order has seen what Leo Suryadinata calls 'a watershed for Chinese education' (2008: 4). In the last fifteen years, the demand for Mandarin, particularly among Chinese Indonesian students, has led to language courses being offered in many private and public schools, often as part of the National Plus curriculum, according to which classes are delivered in a combination of Indonesian, English and Mandarin. The number of private Mandarin language course providers has also mushroomed in the last decade, especially in urban residential areas with large concentrations of middle to upper class Chinese Indonesian families (see Kaboel & Sulanti, 2010). On their part, the PRC government is clearly encouraging the demand for Mandarin language in Indonesia with the opening of seven Confucius Institutes attached to universities in major Indonesian cities. Additionally, in the past five years, a number of alumni organisations made up of older generation Chinese Indonesians who were ex-graduates of Chinese-medium schools, such as the disbanded *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* (Chinese Association) schools, had re-established their pre-Suharto schools with the mission to revive Chinese education for post-Suharto youth. Such organisations include the PaHoa alumni group that established the PaHoa National Plus School in the outer suburbs of Jakarta, the PaChung group that established two schools in Jakarta and the MaChung group that established MaChung University in Malang, East Java (see Setijadi, 2010).

For many middle- and upper-class Chinese Indonesian families, it makes sense to send their children for Mandarin extracurricular lessons or to National Plus schools, especially if they plan on sending their children to China or Taiwan for language or tertiary education. Indeed, in recent years, more and more Chinese Indonesian youth from affluent families go to China not only for language study but also for tertiary education degrees. For instance, data from the Indonesian embassy in Beijing suggest that whereas in 1998, only around 1,000 Indonesian students studied at Chinese universities, in 2012 the number had risen to over 9,000 (Priyambodo, 2012). This is a growing trend away from the dominance of Western countries such as Australia, the US and the UK as the common destinations for Indonesian students pursuing overseas education. Whereas non-Chinese Indonesian students are included in this figure, a large majority are ethnic Chinese youths with hopes of creating a future employment niche for themselves not only with an overseas university degree but also knowledge of modern Chinese language and society. Many among them also hope that their Chinese ethnicity will increase the possibility of future advantageous *guanxi*⁴ connections for career advancement and trade opportunities with China and other Chinese-speaking countries.

‘YOU’RE NOT A REAL CHINESE IF YOU CAN’T SPEAK CHINESE’: LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY AND CHINESE INDONESIAN IDENTITY

At the core of this post-Suharto ‘revival’ of Chinese language use and education is a belief that Chinese Indonesians must now seize the opportunity to re-learn Chinese languages and reclaim a Chinese identity that was lost to the generations that grew up under the New Order. The term ‘lost generation’ has been frequently used by scholars, observers and the Chinese Indonesian public more generally to refer to the post-1965 generation who never learned Chinese, possess little or no knowledge of Chinese culture and had been made to feel ashamed about being Chinese (see Hoon, 2007; Suryadinata, 2008). Many of the older, Chinese-educated *totok* Chinese in particular expressed concerns that contemporary young Chinese Indonesians do not know their identity and the long, proud history of the Chinese people. In an interview, Teddy Jusuf, a former Indonesian Army General and prominent Chinese Indonesian elder who himself was Chinese-educated in the 1940s, complained that:

The [Chinese] youth today cannot speak Mandarin, do not know Chinese culture, and had become completely dissociated from their family’s name and heritage. . . . They do not know who they are. . . . It is the job of the older generation to encourage the youth to learn about their Chinese identity again. . . . In particular they need to learn Mandarin so they can understand the culture. (author’s translation from Indonesian)

In a similar vein, Koko Tanumihardja, a PaHoa alumni and founder of the new PaHoa School remarked:

I remember going to school at the old *PaHoa* school in Patekoan, and I also remember the sadness I felt when the government forcibly closed the school. . . . Not just our school but also all Chinese schools in Indonesia. It was a tragedy for the Chinese, because without the schools, we lost all sense of who we are and the values that set us apart as a people. My children for example, can’t speak Mandarin, although I did try to instil Chinese moral values as much as I could while they were growing up. . . . The younger generation now, they are lucky that they could have Chinese education again. . . . Chinese schools like *PaHoa* need to be resurrected so that the younger generation can re-learn what was lost. (author’s translation from Indonesian)

Evident in what *Pak* (Mister) Teddy and *Pak* Koko said is a common idea among Chinese Indonesians that the ability to speak Chinese is intrinsically linked to Chinese culture and identity.

The belief in the cultural significance of Chinese language is prevalent among Chinese people both in China and in overseas Chinese diaspora

around the world. As scholars note time and time again, most Chinese—even those who do not speak Chinese themselves—hold the position that without the ability to speak Chinese, a Chinese person could never be a ‘complete’ Chinese (see Li & Zhu, 2010; Tu, 1991; Wang, 1991). Here, the ability to read and write in Chinese is desirable, but a Chinese person should at least be able to speak Chinese. For ethnic Chinese living in overseas Chinese diaspora, the issue is arguably even more complicated considering that, as Chinese who live in the ‘periphery,’ Chinese languages and culture are often preserved with particular zeal as the means by which overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) could maintain their connection with China as the mythical homeland. In her book *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*, Ien Ang argues that for ethnic Chinese in diaspora, the inability to speak Chinese is ‘a condition that has been hegemonically constructed as a lack, a sign of loss of authenticity’ (2001: 30). According to this logic, Chinese persons who somehow ‘lost’ the ability to speak Chinese are constructed as inauthentic or ‘fake’ Chinese, both by others and by themselves.

Indeed, during interviews with young Chinese Indonesians, this ideology about the importance of Chinese language to identity is prevalent and would often come up during conversations about how the youth view their Chineseness in relation to their ability (or inability) to speak Chinese. For example, in an interview with Ben and Fenny, two 30-year-old *peranakan* Chinese, they joked about how they were ‘fake’ Chinese (*cina palsu*) because they did not know how to speak Chinese:

- Ben: It is actually quite funny that the *pribumi* call me Chinese because actually, a real Chinese person would never pass me as a Chinese [laughs].
- Interviewer: What do you think makes a real Chinese person?
- Ben: Well, for one, you’d have to be able to speak Chinese, which I can’t.
- Fenny: That’s right, I’m a fake Chinese too like Ben [laughs]. My grandparents could still speak Chinese [Hakka], but my parents were never taught properly and could only speak a little bit of Chinese. But my siblings and I, we can’t speak any Chinese at all.
- Ben: So your family gets faker and faker [as Chinese] with each generation [laughs].
- Fenny: Yeah, you can say that, we got diluted over time! [laughs]
- Ben: Everyone knows that you’re not a real Chinese if you can’t speak Chinese.

(author’s translation from Indonesian)

For young people like Ben and Fenny, the experience of realising their status as a so-called ‘fake’ Chinese could sometimes be a harsh one, as discovered by Alex, a 32-year-old male from a *totok* Chinese background who felt hurt

when he thought that people in mainland China did not regard him as a 'real' Chinese while on a family trip to China:

Growing up, I was always told that I should be proud of being a Chinese, and our family spoke Hokkien at home. I only knew very little Mandarin, but when our family went to China for holiday, I tried speaking in Mandarin to shopkeepers and when ordering food. . . . But the shopkeepers would talk back to me really fast, and I couldn't understand what they were saying! They just looked at me like they were angry at me for not being able to speak proper Chinese. . . . I felt so sad because I felt like I didn't belong there [in China] and that I was not a real Chinese. . . . Now I know that other Chinese people, especially those in the mainland, don't regard us Chinese Indonesians as Chinese anyway. (author's translation from Indonesian)

Although Alex's experience of being regarded as inauthentic is quite common among overseas Chinese and members of other diaspora, the Chinese Indonesian experience is unique because, feeling like they are neither accepted as Indonesian nor Chinese, many Chinese Indonesians are unsure about where they belong.

In many ways, being able to speak Chinese carries a particular symbolic significance for Chinese Indonesians in the post-Suharto era as they now struggle to reclaim what is perceived as a lost Chinese identity. If in the past, speaking in Chinese was seen as something shameful and politically dangerous, now the tables have turned and being able to speak Chinese is considered an asset that needs to be acquired quickly. Furthermore, at a time when Chinese Indonesians are seeking to redefine their ethnic and national identities following more than three decades of assimilation, more and more contemporary Chinese from *totok* and *peranakan* backgrounds are learning Mandarin as a way to forge connection to a pan-Chinese identity. Feeling like they could never be regarded as a 'true' Indonesian by the *pribumi*, many young Chinese Indonesians are reorienting themselves towards China and Chinese culture, and learning Mandarin is often viewed as the most effective way to do so.

THE RISE OF CHINA, MANDARIN AND ISSUES IN CONTEXT

One of the most interesting aspects of the post-Suharto return of Chinese languages has been the privileging of Mandarin as *the* language to learn among Chinese Indonesian youth. If in the past, the Chinese in Indonesia mainly spoke southern Min languages such as Hokkien, Hakka and Teochew, today, the emphasis is on the learning and use of Mandarin as the official language spoken in the PRC, Taiwan and Singapore. Regional Chinese languages traditional to Chinese Indonesian families were rendered

useless, as they would not give the Chinese Indonesians any advantage in terms of education, trade or future career paths. For example, in a group interview with Henry, Jimmy and Maria, three university students in their early twenties who all studied at the same Mandarin language tuition centre in Jakarta, all three participants had similar views about the importance of Mandarin in comparison to the original languages spoken by their families:

- Interviewer: So what made you guys decide to learn Mandarin?
Henry: I want to do my Master's degree maybe in China or Taiwan, so I need to learn Mandarin in order to do that.
Maria: I was just interested in learning because even when I was a teenager, I always liked watching Chinese films and TV series, so I wanted to learn the language [laughs].
Jimmy: My parents wanted me to learn Mandarin and I thought that it would be a good skill to have too.
Interviewer: So do your parents or grandparents speak Mandarin too?
Jimmy: No, my family were originally from Kuntien [Pontianak], so they spoke Teochew.
Henry: My family was from Bangka and at home we still speak Khek [Hakka].
Maria: I think my late grandfather knew Mandarin because he went to a Chinese school, but our family spoke Khek. I can't speak Khek though because I never learnt it.
Interviewer: So how come you are learning Mandarin now and not your family's traditional languages?
Henry: Because it would be useless to learn Khek [laughs].
Maria: Yeah [laughs] we wouldn't be able to use the language much, and Khek doesn't get used much anywhere.
Henry: And Mandarin is the language for education, business and all that so it is useful for us to know Mandarin.
Jimmy: It [Mandarin] would help us communicate with people in China, Singapore, and in other places too. It is going to take over English as the global language in the future.
(author's translation from Indonesian)

As discussed by Li Wei and Zhu Hua (2010), whereas overseas Chinese living in diaspora have traditionally been dialect dominant, globalisation and the rise of China as a global politico-economic power mean that Mandarin is gaining particular prestige among the Chinese diasporas. In the same paper, Li and Zhu gave the example that all Cantonese schools for British Chinese children in the UK now also teach Mandarin, whereas none of the Mandarin schools teach Cantonese.⁵ The situation is very similar in Indonesia, where virtually all of the schools, universities and private course providers that claim to teach Chinese only teach Mandarin and none of the other Chinese languages. Traditional languages such as Hakka, Hokkien and

Teochew are only taught and maintained at home, and mainly used to communicate among families and networks that originated from the same local regions in Indonesia (e.g., Khek is still commonly spoken among the Hakka Chinese from Bangka, Hokkien among the Chinese from Medan, etc.). It is true that Mandarin had been a dominant language even in pre-assimilation Chinese medium schools, such as the THHK or Xinhua schools. However, the post-Suharto situation is different in that most Chinese Indonesian families no longer spoke their traditional familial languages anymore. As the younger ethnic Chinese learn and communicate in Mandarin rather than Hakka, Hokkien or other Chinese languages, the concern is that these languages will eventually 'die off' in Indonesia as a result.

Another issue with the teaching of Mandarin in Indonesia is that, because the teaching in Mandarin on a large scale is a relatively new phenomenon, almost all of the materials used in classes and tuitions are imported from China, Taiwan, Singapore or Malaysia. Furthermore, the shortage of good quality Mandarin teachers in Indonesia means that Mandarin language schools and course providers resort to hiring expatriate teachers from China or Taiwan. As one Chinese Indonesian Mandarin language teacher tells me, consequently, very little of the teaching materials used in classes relate to the culture or everyday lives of Chinese Indonesians. Furthermore, this teacher also tells me that because many Mandarin teachers come from China, local teachers like him worry that PRC-sanctioned Mandarin pronunciation and manner of speaking would be the standard for Chinese Indonesians. Such concerns highlight the uncertainties that revolve around the dominance of Mandarin and the potential for mainland Chinese 'cultural imperialism' among Chinese Indonesians in the future.

Voices of apprehension have also come from *peranakan* Chinese Indonesians who feel unrepresented by the recent trend among *totok* Chinese to speak Mandarin and orientate themselves towards China. This kind of view is evident in a conversation between Christa, a 34-year-old female from a *totok* background, and David, a 33-year-old from a *peranakan* background. During the joint interview, the two disagreed about the effects of the resinification of *totok* Chinese Indonesians, which in David's opinion creates a negative stereotype of all ethnic Chinese:

David: It makes me uncomfortable that, now, a lot of Chinese are speaking Mandarin in public.

Interviewer: Why does it make you feel uncomfortable?

David: Because it creates a bad impression for all Chinese. Can you imagine what the *pribumi* would think when they hear a bunch of Chinese people speaking in Chinese? I think the Chinese forget that the [May '98] riots weren't that long ago. . . . Just because now we can speak in Chinese, doesn't mean that we should be insensitive.

- Christa: I disagree with you David, I think you're being unfair. The Chinese have every right to speak in Chinese, or in whatever language they want to. I can speak Mandarin, but that doesn't mean that I'm any less Indonesian or that I'm insensitive to the *pribumi*.
- David: What I mean is this: I think it doesn't look good for the Chinese to suddenly be all 'Chinese' once we were allowed to. . . . Doesn't that just confirm all the things the *pribumi* thought about us as not being Indonesian? Besides, my family is *peranakan* and we never spoke Chinese at home. . . . I see no reason to start doing so now.
(author's translation from Indonesian)

Reflected in the conversation between Christa and David is the long-standing social, cultural and political differences that exist between *totok* and *peranakan* Chinese. Whereas the *totok* Chinese in general seem to be embracing the opportunity to speak Mandarin, many *peranakan* Chinese like David reject it altogether.

Here, although the differences between the two 'groups' are not as pronounced as what they used to be prior to assimilation, contemporary Chinese Indonesians still differentiate themselves from each other based on the *totok/peranakan* distinction, particularly when discussing the reasons for their chosen cultural orientations. At the crux of differing *totok* and *peranakan* attitudes towards China, Chinese culture and language is the reality that, even in the post-Suharto era, debates still rage about where the ethnic Chinese are (or should be) located in the greater scheme of Indonesian national belonging. In a country where national identity is still very much defined by ethno-nationalist ideology, many Chinese and *pribumi* Indonesians continue to view Chinese and Indonesian identities as essentially incompatible. For the Chinese, the choice of which language to speak and when is fraught with sociopolitical considerations related to the kind of belonging they aspire to.

CODE-SWITCHING AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CHINESE INDONESIAN IDENTITIES

Among the young ethnic Chinese who aspire to speak Mandarin, there is a recent trend of engaging in the practice of code-switching in everyday speech, particularly when they are in the company of other Chinese who also aspire to speak Mandarin. Code-switching, or the practice of alternating between two or more languages during a single speech act, is a feature of bi- and multilingualism that has been amply researched over the past three decades (see Auer, 1988; Milroy & Muysken, 1995). However, it is not until relatively recently that scholars started to investigate how

bi- and multilingual speakers utilise code-switching as a linguistic strategy in the construction of ethnic identity (see Block, 2007; Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005; De Fina, 2007). Here, scholars have found that the act of code-switching can be transformative for the speakers because it allows the speakers to creatively bring together their personal histories and social contexts in order to make sense of their multilingual identities (see Garcia, 2009; Li, 2011). The result is the creation of new language spaces where hybrid identities are negotiated. Language proficiency almost does not matter in this regard because the rules and boundaries of code-switching continuously change according to the speakers' life experiences and needs.

For Chinese Indonesian youth who aspire to speak Mandarin, code-switching between Indonesian and Mandarin (and sometimes English) is a speech strategy that allows them to speak Mandarin, even when they only know very few Mandarin sentences or phrases. Such code-switching acts usually only occur when the young people are in the presence of other friends who also know some Mandarin, or—as was the case during interviews for this research—they find themselves in a situation where they feel like they need to emphasise their Chineseness. Whereas words from other Chinese languages, such as Hokkien, often also get used in code-switching, in recent times, Mandarin as the language most young Chinese learn is the language most commonly used for code-switching. For example, the following excerpt was recorded during a group interview with Ling Ling, Melia and Andri, three friends in their early twenties who all spoke beginner level Mandarin:

- Interviewer: *Jadi kalian bisa ngomong Mandarin?*
(So do you guys speak Mandarin?)
- Andri: [laughs] *ya, kalau yi dian dian Zhongwen bisa lah.*
(well, if it is just a little bit of Mandarin then I can do a bit.)
- Ling: Ling: *Ahhh, gaya si Andri sok bisa, tapi kalau disuruh ngomong depan orang pasti dia bù h o yìsi!* [laughs]
(Ahhh, Andri is just playing it up, if he has to speak it in front of other people then I bet that he'd be embarrassed!)
- Interviewer: *Kenapa kok malu kalau ngomong Mandarin di depan orang lain Andri?*
(Why do you get embarrassed if you have to speak Mandarin in front of other people Andri?)
- Andri: *Karena gue cuma tau dikit-dikit tapi sok tau* [laughs].
(Because I only know a bit but I pretend to know a lot.)
- Melia: *Iya terus abis itu dia panik kalau diajak ngomong yang susah, dia wo bù zh dào lah, wo bù zh dào!*
(Yes but then he panics when someone then starts talking complicated [Mandarin] to him, he'll go I don't know, I don't know!)

sample: (author's translation from Jakartan dialect Indonesian and Mandarin)

Neither Ling Ling, Andri or Melia came from Mandarin-speaking families and, like so many other post-Suharto Chinese youth, they only started learning and speaking Mandarin at their private schools during compulsory Mandarin language classes. Initially uninterested by the language, they became more motivated users of Mandarin during their university years when they realised its potential usefulness. Here, code-switching is not only a way for friends to practice their limited Mandarin with one another; it is also a way to reaffirm each other's Chineseness. As Andri claimed during the interview, 'it is nice to be able to speak in a language of the Chinese people' (author's translation from Indonesian).

Indeed, one of the most common situations in which the Chinese youth I observed code-switched with one another was when they wanted to say something to each other without wanting the *pribumi* to understand what they were saying. For instance, Ling Ling, who admits to frequently using Mandarin words or sentences when speaking with her ethnic Chinese friends said, 'I like being able to speak Mandarin because that means that I can speak in Mandarin with my friends without the *fngui*⁶ understanding what we're saying. . . . It is like having a secret language' (author's translation from Indonesian). Asked whether she ever gets worried about whether the *pribumi* would get offended when she speaks in Mandarin near them, Ling Ling answered:

Well, I guess so, there was this one time that my friend and I were speaking in Mandarin, and then this [*pribumi*] man told us off and said that we should speak Indonesian because we're in Indonesia. . . . But I think that's not fair because we have the right to speak our own language now. . . . The *pribumi* themselves also have languages that we don't understand like Sundanese or Batakese, so why shouldn't we be able to speak our own language? (author's translation from Indonesian)

A number of other young Chinese interviewed shared the same opinion as Ling Ling, with Singapore or Malaysia often cited as positive examples of Southeast Asian countries where Chinese could coexist with other languages like Malay, Hindi and English in the public domain. However, as is the case with many other sociocultural aspects of Chinese Indonesian lives, the issue of language choice is complex and laden with uncertainties about how much Chinese is acceptable in public. For now, the increasing use of code-switching among young people indicates that many contemporary Chinese Indonesians are experimenting with Mandarin as a means of identification. Consequently, as new spaces for identity expression are created, the meanings and boundaries of Chineseness in Indonesia are also continuously being redefined.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have presented the case of Mandarin language learning and use among young Chinese Indonesians in the post-Suharto era. At a

time when Chinese Indonesians are free to 'be Chinese' again, learning and speaking Mandarin has become one of the most important ways in which Chinese identities are expressed. The demand for Mandarin is evident in the large number of schools, universities and private course providers that started offering Mandarin language teaching in recent years, and the number of Indonesian tertiary and language students in the PRC and Taiwan is presently at an all-time high. Here, motivations for learning Mandarin vary from the sentimental (e.g., wanting to reconnect to a 'lost' Chinese identity) to the pragmatic (e.g., wanting to keep up with the rise of China and tap into the potential for *guanxi*). Regardless of their motivation, however, one defining feature of Chinese Indonesians currently learning or speaking Mandarin is a sense of renewed pride in their Chinese ethnicity where, for the first time in a long time, Chineseness is seen as an asset and no longer a sociopolitical liability. Speaking Chinese in public is seen as increasingly acceptable, and more and more young Chinese Indonesians are engaging in code-switching between Indonesian and Mandarin in everyday speech with each other.

Nevertheless, there are pertinent issues associated with the return of Chinese languages in post-Suharto Indonesia. For one, the vastly popular preference for Mandarin as *the* language to learn and speak among the young people means that regional languages such as Hokkien and Hakka traditionally spoken by Chinese families are under the threat of eventually becoming extinct in Indonesia. This privileging of Mandarin above regional Chinese languages is consistent with the trend seen in other Chinese diaspora worldwide, where the promotion of Mandarin as the official language of the PRC has increased its authenticity, prestige and demand among overseas Chinese (see Gao, 2012; Li & Zhu, 2010). From a theoretical point of view, the fact that many Chinese Indonesian families are encouraging their young to learn Mandarin as a way to reconnect to a 'lost' Chinese identity even though their ancestors never spoke Mandarin highlights the constructed nature of language ideology and ethnic identity. Furthermore, the return of Chinese languages in the public domain raises questions about how this process of resinification is perceived, not just by *pribumi* Indonesians, but also by ethnic Chinese who feel uncomfortable about the trend. As discussed in this chapter, many Chinese Indonesians from *peranakan* backgrounds had always felt wholly Indonesian and thus consider the recent move to speak Mandarin and reorient towards China to be unrepresentative of the *peranakan* sociocultural heritage. Some of these Chinese Indonesians also feel anxious about the potentially harmful effects of post-Suharto resinification on the already fragile political image of the Chinese in Indonesia.

Issues surrounding the politics of language among ethnic Chinese in the post-Suharto era are intrinsically linked to the long-standing Chinese 'problem' in Indonesia. For contemporary Chinese Indonesians, choosing which language(s) to speak and when is not a simple matter, and the decision whether to speak Chinese or not is ultimately a statement of individuals' sense of ethnic and national belonging. For now, however, recent trends

suggest that Mandarin will continue to gain popularity among younger Chinese Indonesians, particularly as China gains more international prominence politically, economically and culturally. As Mandarin becomes more widely spoken among Chinese Indonesians, the characteristics and boundaries of Chineseness in Indonesia will continue to be redefined. As such, more critical reflections are needed in the future in order for scholars to analyse what these changes mean, both for Chinese Indonesian identity politics and the study of language politics in Chinese diasporas.

NOTES

1. The names of research respondents have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.
2. *Totok* Chinese are generally regarded as less intermingled with the local communities and still very much culturally orientated towards China. The term *peranakan* on the other hand generally refers to the Chinese who have lived in Indonesia for centuries—in many cases even of mixed ancestry—and have intermingled with local cultures. Such distinction should only be seen as a common and convenient way to differentiate between *totok* and *peranakan* as, even within these two groups, the Chinese were far from unified and most of their political decisions were motivated by pragmatism and self-preservation. Scholars now generally regard the *totok-peranakan* distinction to be outdated, but the terms are still frequently used by Chinese Indonesians when referring to the degrees to which their families adhere to Chinese cultural traditions (see Hoon, 2007; Tsai, 2008).
3. These figures were official statistics released by the Education Ministry. For in-depth accounts and analyses of events leading to the language ban, see Coppel (1983).
4. *Guanxi* (pronounced kuan-shi) literally means ‘relation’ or ‘relationship’ as a noun, and ‘relate to’ as a verb, although as commonly used in contemporary Chinese society it refers more narrowly to ‘particularistic ties’ (Jacobs, 1980). According to Thomas Gold, Doug Guthrie and David Wank, these relations are based on ascribed or primordial traits such as kinship, native places and ethnicity, and also on acquired characteristics such as attending the same school, serving in the same military unit and doing business together (2002: 6). Because of the emphasis on primordial traits, it is generally understood among the Chinese (both in pan-Chinese countries and in the diaspora) that their shared ethnicity means that they will benefit from mutual preferential treatment when dealing with each other (see Ong, 1999).
5. The promotion of Mandarin at the expense of regional languages has been well noted in recent sociolinguistic research. For more on the topic, along with examples from other Chinese-speaking counties and communities, see Gao (2012), Tan (2006) and Wang & Ladegaard (2008).
6. *Fāngui* is a Mandarin term meaning ‘dark foreigner’ and it is a derogatory term often used by Chinese Indonesians to describe the *pribumi*.

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